

W

W269i

1833







AN

INTRODUCTORY

LECTURE

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE MEDICAL CLASS IN HARVARD UNIVERSITY,

ON THE

16TH OF OCTOBER, 1833.



BY JOHN WARE, M. D.,

ADJUNCT PROFESSOR OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF MEDICINE
IN THE UNIVERSITY.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CLASS.

265-20
BOSTON:

HILLIARD, GRAY, AND COMPANY.

1833.

W
W269i
1833

CAMBRIDGE:

CHARLES FOLSOM, PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY.

LECTURE.

WE are met, this morning, Gentlemen, for the purpose of beginning a course of instruction in the elements of medical science. Of those whom I address, many, no doubt, have already made considerable progress in their professional studies ; some approach the period of their termination ; whilst some, on the other hand, have but just entered upon them. But whatever be the time, at which you severally expect to commence the active duties of life, whether it be near or remote, the minds of all of you are probably directed towards it, as an important era, with mingled hope and fear. Your immediate object at present should of course be to qualify yourselves for the station you are to hold in society, by the acquisition of a competent amount of professional knowledge ; but there are many other considerations relating to the office of a physician, which should sometimes also engage your attention.

No man ought to meet with great success in the practice of medicine, no man ought to get an extensive business, unless he be actually well informed, — unless he deserve it. And few, I believe, do reach to a truly desirable kind or height of reputation without being well educated ; but many, who are well educated, fail in attaining to such a reputation, and find themselves, through life, far behind many contemporaries, who have not half their talents or medical knowledge. No man perhaps succeeds greatly without deserving it ; but many, who deserve it, do not succeed. Now what is the reason of this ? It is at once obvious, if this statement be true, that to success as a practitioner something beside mere professional merit is necessary. A physician must have other accomplishments than those which are strictly professional. His relation to society is something more than that of a mere investigator of the character of disease and a dispenser of the means of curing it. He must be able to do this and do it well ; but he must also be able to do something more ; he must have other qualifications.

It is true you have no immediate use for the qualifications of which I speak. Having no direct personal connexion with patients, you cannot exercise the accomplishments to which I refer. It is nevertheless

necessary, in order that you should acquit yourselves to your satisfaction when the time comes, that you should early form just ideas of the nature of your profession, its connexion with society, the duties which it calls on you to perform, the light in which you will be regarded when you practise it, and the character and deportment which will become you in the performance of its offices. It is only by entertaining proper views on all these points, that you will be aware of what will be expected of you on the one hand, and of what you ought to be ready to perform on the other.

I do not intend to enter into a detailed statement on this subject. A volume might easily be written upon it, and I regret that there is no such volume in existence. But you will excuse me, I do not doubt, if I devote the time, allotted to us this morning, to some general remarks on the character and relations of the medical profession, which will perhaps serve the purpose of directing your attention to the subject, and furnish you with materials, that will enable you to form for yourselves just views of the course of conduct it will become you hereafter to pursue.

There is little in the reputation of the physician which would be desirable to a man of ordinary am-

bition. It is not a profession suited to one who loves display, — who would live in the mouths of his fellow men, — who would enjoy a widely extended name and influence. The physician is but little known beyond his actual sphere of practice, and this must be, from the nature of the case, extremely narrow. However he may be esteemed and even venerated in the community in which he resides, his worth can rarely be made known beyond it. No man's services are more valued in private life, no man is more important to families and individuals as such; but he forms no part in the public apparatus of the community, — all its machinery goes on as well without him as with him. His duties are performed to individuals, and not to bodies of men. He is obliged by a sort of physical necessity to revolve in one single circle, and that of very small extent.

This is true not only of physicians in general but of some of those who have distinguished themselves as philosophers and reformers in the profession. It is true, in great measure, of those who have displayed talents and exercised an influence, which, in any other department of science or any other walk of life, would have made their reputation coëxtensive with the civilized world. In point of fact, how little is known, except by medical men themselves, of the

great lights of our profession, either of this or of former ages. Compare the fame of Harvey, for instance, with that of Newton. I would not put the discoveries of the former on a level with those of the latter, either in respect to their intrinsic importance, or to the qualities of mind indicated in the individuals who made them. Yet there are some points of resemblance in their labors, which afford a reason for ranking them, as discoverers in science, in the same class. The discovery of the circulation of the blood by Harvey was not less fundamental, or essential to a right understanding of the science of life, than that of gravitation by Newton was to the right understanding of all physical science. In the two great divisions of the creation, animate matter and inanimate matter, they were the discoverers of the principles or laws, with which all subsequent advances in knowledge have been connected, and on which they have been in some measure dependent.

Yet how different is the reputation they have enjoyed, not only in kind, which was perhaps to be expected, but in degree and extent. Who hears the name of Harvey uttered beyond the limits of our profession? Who knows any thing of his life or labors? How little do men estimate the

value of his discovery, or the influence it has had on a science, to which they are notwithstanding daily looking for aid and comfort? Who does not hear the name of Newton? It is equally in the mouth of the philosopher and of the school-boy. It is associated in every man's mind, throughout the civilized world, with the laws of the universe which he inhabits.

Compare Bichat with Davy. They were men strongly resembling each other in genius, in an early developement of talent, and in the commanding influence they exercised over the sciences to which they were respectively devoted. Each too arrived in early youth at an eminence in his separate sphere of exertion, which is with most men the reward of many years of unwearied toil. But how different the rank which they hold with the world at large! The anatomist, the physiologist, looks up to Bichat with an admiration approaching that which the chemist feels in regard to Davy. But ask the man of letters, the man of the world, the politician, the lawyer, what he knows of the two philosophers, and you will find a striking and truly mortifying difference.

To take a still stronger example; suppose that the great founder of modern surgery, John Hunter,

had been a lawyer or a statesman, and had applied to his pursuits the profound sagacity and unequalled industry which he bestowed on anatomy and physiology ; he would have acquired a reputation equal to that of any individual of the age in which he lived. We should have heard of him in the same breath with Mansfield, Burke, and Johnson. But what does the world know of him now, or what did his contemporaries know of him then ? Little more than that he was a very respectable surgeon, which, in comparison with the actual character and desert of the individual, is much as if one were to say of Lord Mansfield, that he was a respectable barrister.

Not that the world is disposed to deny the praise of greatness to men eminent in our profession. The truth is, that their claims are not, and cannot be, fairly brought before it. It does not understand the measure by which their qualifications are to be estimated. Few, except physicians themselves, are capable of appreciating the merits of a medical man ; and, more than this, his talents are exerted in a field so remote from common observation, that the materials for a judgment are not readily afforded even to those capable of judging. This is no ground of complaint. It is no injustice. We perceive no disposition to

rob members of our profession of their due share of fame, whether contemporary or posthumous. We state merely the fact, that they do not attain to that reputation, which the same talents, industry, and success would have ensured to them in other walks of life. This fact grows out of the nature of their duties and of their relation to society.

But there is some compensation for this in the nature of the estimation which they enjoy in the sphere in which they do move. No confidence is so implicit as that which is reposed in a physician of good character, by the community to which he belongs. His character and connexion with society are such, as to invite an undoubting reliance upon him, not only in his particular vocation, but in all circumstances which require fidelity and intelligence. The authority acquired by some physicians over the minds of their patients has been very great. The affection with which they are sometimes regarded is not less remarkable. No man probably has a strong hold on the affections of so many individuals, as an amiable and skilful physician; there is none, not even the minister of religion, whose connexion with families is so intimate and so domestic, and none whose loss is more deeply felt.

This sort of reputation, this interest in the feelings of mankind, we must take, I say, as a compensation for the absence of those means of rendering ourselves known to the world, which are possessed by men of other occupations. We cannot, like the preacher, the lawyer, the legislator, acquire reputation coëxtensive with our country or the world; but we may secure, by a diligent performance of our humbler but not less useful duties, an interest in the hearts of a narrow circle, which may be far more gratifying than the cold applauses of a nation.

This strong interest, with which physicians of proper character are regarded, grows out of the peculiar nature of the connexion that exists between them and their patients. Our attention is not often directed to this point, and probably neither physicians nor patients are generally aware of the exact nature of the relation subsisting between them, although they may strictly perform all the duties which grow out of it. They are unconscious of the precise character, or at least of the whole character, of the services which they are receiving and rendering. Thus, if any man be asked, why he confides in and has an affection for his physician, he readily answers you, that it is because he believes him to be skilful in his profession, and has been

faithfully attended by him in sickness. But this, I apprehend, is not the only, if it be indeed the principal source of that reliance on physicians, which is felt by those who are laboring under disease, or the friends by whom they are surrounded. What other source, then, does exist?

Every one who has experienced it, knows very well, and others hardly can know, how distracting is that anxiety which we undergo during the dangerous sickness of ourselves or our friends; how much it prostrates our self-control and self-reliance; how it fills the mind with doubt; what terrible suspense consumes our days, and what images of horror visit our sleeping hours. It is from this state of mind that mankind seek and find at least temporary relief, in the presence and counsel of the physician. They need some one on whom they may lean, some one upon whom they can throw the feeling of responsibility, from whom they may expect an opinion which shall either destroy their hopes or banish their fears, and thus at any rate diminish that greatest of trials to the mind, suspense. In all seasons of danger and dismay, we derive inexpressible, and perhaps unaccountable, satisfaction from the simple presence of an individual who is known to understand and appreciate the nature of the evils which threaten

us, even should we know that the danger itself is in no degree lessened by his presence or his counsel. This is peculiarly the case in sickness. No danger so unsettles the self-command of even the firmest minds, because there is none of which the nature and degree are so little understood. In proportion to the uncertainty and suspense which exists, will be the relief afforded by the calm, steady, and unruffled deportment, which it is the part of the physician to display under circumstances the most embarrassing and uncertain. If the danger itself be not diminished, the apprehension of it, the suffering of fear, is greatly taken away. So astonishing is sometimes this influence on the feelings of friends and of the sick, that their first impression seems to be, that the danger itself has vanished. This is observable even in cases where the presence of the medical adviser only serves to confirm the worst fears and to extinguish the last hope. How often is it said to us on such occasions, — “We are thankful to know the worst; we know that you can do nothing; but when you are here, we feel safe.” So preferable is certainty to suspense; so much better can we bear to know that nothing can be done, than to be in doubt what should be done.

The service which a physician renders in this way is not, indeed, independent of, but wholly in addition to, that which consists in the administration of the resources of the healing art. It is a moral influence derived from and founded upon a general confidence in his knowledge and skill, but not at all connected with the belief, in each particular case, that his skill will be of any avail. His presence and support are not less sought for, and are not less efficacious in soothing the anxieties of patients and their friends, in cases necessarily mortal, than in those which are simply dangerous. The comfort of a decided state of mind and of a freedom from responsibility is what the friends of the sick crave. They yearn for some strong arm on which to rest the harassed mind. Hence the so common desire, particularly among those of little firmness, that we should fly to our patients even when the hand of death is upon them,—not that we may minister to their sufferings, but that our presence may serve as a stay and support to their friends.

I do not know that I have been successful in exactly defining the nature of the services which are thus rendered by physicians; but many, I presume, may find a confirmation of my remarks and an illustration of them, if they will analyse the state of their

own minds in times of danger and anxiety. They may perceive, that there is a relation between the physician and his patients distinct from that which consists in the administration of the resources of art, though ultimately growing out of a belief in his knowledge and skill in that respect, — a relation contributing not a little to the comfort and satisfaction of the sick and their friends, and well worthy to be borne in mind and understood by those who are entering on the study of medicine.

Some men have doubted, whether the art of medicine be capable of doing any thing toward the cure of diseases directly; whether it be in our power, by medicinal applications, to control in any measure those processes of the system in which disease consists. This is the excess of skepticism in medicine. But there is really some ground for the suspicion, that, taking the practitioners of medicine in a mass, — the skilful with the unskilful, the educated with the ignorant, the prudent with the rash, the wise with the stupid, — nature would do as much for the cure of diseases as art does. But even admitting that medicine were of no efficacy in the way commonly supposed, still, with the present belief and feelings of mankind on the subject, the profession would be of incalculable value, as a benevolent insti-

tution for alleviating the anxieties and assuming the responsibility of sickness. And yet further, were there no such faith among mankind as now exists concerning the powers of the healing art, — still, if there were a class of men who made the history of the human body and its diseases their study, and who were able, in consequence, to give correct opinions concerning the nature, the danger, and the probable course and result of a disease, I believe that their presence and their opinion would be sought with eagerness, and would essentially contribute to the alleviation of human suffering.

It would seem, then, that the profession of the physician is made necessary by the refined moral feelings of mankind, as well as by the desire of relief from pain and the removal of disease. In accordance with this remark, it is to be observed, that the demand for medical attendance, and more especially for peculiar moral qualities in those from whom it is sought, increases with the increasing civilization and refinement of society; still further, that it is much greater in the higher and more refined classes of a community, at the same time, than it is in the lower.

It is from the character of this relation, in part at least, that confidence in physicians is of so slow and

gradual growth. No doubt the well-founded opinion, that experience is essential to excellence, contributes much to the same effect; but, independently of this, long personal intercourse is necessary to give patients that entire and undoubting reliance, which is so often felt by them. It is frequently regarded by us, when young in practice, as a hardship, that confidence is yielded to us so slowly and reluctantly; — that we are obliged to wind our way so gradually into public esteem, and consequently too often to pass the flower of our days, either without employment, or in employment which scarcely yields to us any thing but the hope of something better. But I am not sure that this is so great an evil as it appears. Confidence which is easily gained, is easily lost. It is confidence reposed in his elders, which makes it, for the young man, a thing so difficult to attain. The same cause will continue to him hereafter that which he has once acquired. Could he easily supplant his seniors in public esteem when young, what assurance has he that he will not be himself supplanted when he is old?

The truth is, that physicians acquire that confidence of which I have spoken, only by growing up with a generation. It is rarely felt by patients towards one whom they have newly adopted, or tran-

siently employed. It is constantly remarked by those who have from early life been conversant with one physician and have afterwards lost him, that no one is found to make his place good. The art of making one's way in the world, of passing for more than one is worth, of dazzling the sober sense of mankind by a glare of false pretension, will sometimes acquire for a physician a degree of notoriety, but seldom a permanent reputation. Even rare qualifications of nature and education, except under circumstances uncommonly favorable, make but gradual progress. It was remarked by Dr. Baillie, that he had never known a physician, who, from any cause, acquired business rapidly in the city of London, and who retained it; and this corresponds well with the remark we have here made. If it be rapidly acquired, this must be accomplished by means independent of those which give a firm hold on the confidence and affections of patients; for they cannot at once be displayed, nor can they at once have their full operation.

There are many advantages in this gradual growth of reputation, accompanied no doubt by some disadvantages. It makes the profession progressive during the active part of life; it affords a constant motive for activity; it stimulates us to continue our

exertions to deserve, in order that we may attain to an increase of reputation and emolument. It is apt to be destructive to a man's improvement, to have arrived early in life at eminence in his profession, — to have enjoyed in youth the regard and confidence which are usually the privilege of riper years only. Ambition is cloyed; the love of distinction is sated; and the desire of improvement is deadened. It is a most difficult task to keep possession of an eminence thus gained; whilst, at the same time, the motive to the requisite exertion is feeble and constantly diminishing. Hence premature reputation, even with a competent share of merit, is seldom permanent. But where public confidence is slowly yielded, and yielded only on the assurance of sufficient desert, the motive to improvement is constantly operative; and, as a necessary consequence, the satisfaction arising from this source is always new and never exhausted.

This leads me to make some remarks on the principles, which should guide us in the means we employ for the acquisition of business. I have already observed, that the success of men is not always in proportion to their professional merit, but that other circumstances contribute to it. A physician's first object should of course be to qualify himself for the

treatment of disease ; but, whilst he does not fail in this, it is right for him to cultivate such other qualifications as shall promote the final object of his entrance on the profession.

The measures, to which men have had recourse to get medical business, have so often been mean and dishonorable, as to have become almost proverbial. A celebrated physician, noted for his coarseness, brutality, and profaneness, once remarked to a beginner in practice, that there were two ways of getting into business ; one by bullying, and the other by cajoling, mankind. "I," said he, "have succeeded very well with the first, and you may perhaps do well to try the second." Gentlemen, if I believed that there were no way of rising to notice in our profession, but by the adoption of the mean arts and paltry tricks which are implied in this advice, I would at once advise you to turn your backs upon it, as a calling unworthy of an honorable man. But I know that this is far, very far, from being true. There are means of gaining the confidence of mankind which we can exercise without degrading ourselves ; and we may always be assured, that, if we maintain a course and character by which we forfeit our self-respect, we shall sooner or later lose that of our fellow men.

I do not here speak of the sudden acquisition of business; this, where there is any competition, can only be the result of art or accident; but of that honorable and substantial reputation, which alone is worth having. In what I have already said, I have alluded to some of the principal circumstances which will ensure it. But I may remark in addition on a few points which should distinguish the character of the physician.

He should show that his profession is the great object of his life, and consequently of his thoughts; —and it should be so. Yet I would not have him withdraw his attention from all other studies, nor all other pursuits. This would be to narrow his mind, and to render him less intelligent even in his own department. Neither would I have him needlessly intrude his knowledge of medicine or his devotion to it, at all times, on those in whose society he is placed. He should embrace every reasonable opportunity of making known his attainments; but let him avoid that boasting and conceited style of conversation with regard to himself, which, however it may for a time impose on the credulous and the weak, does in the end lessen a man in the esteem of others, as it ought to do in his own.

The physician should be devoted to the welfare of his patients, and his manner should be such that they may feel that he is so. One man may really be willing to do as much for the sick as another, he may feel the same interest in the case, he may give it the same attention, and succeed as well in its treatment; — yet he may appear to the patient cold, heartless, and indifferent. Now I would not recommend the expression of any mawkish sensibility at the bedside of the sick; neither is the physician called to the direct utterance of any words of sympathy with the sufferings of those whom he attends. But he is bound to the exercise of a uniform kindness, gentleness, and tenderness of manner, from which nothing should induce him to deviate. And if I were to name any one thing more than another, which within my own observation has contributed to the success of physicians, it would be such a manner and management in the sick room as indicate regard for the welfare of their patients, consideration for their feelings, and sympathy with their sufferings, accompanied by an earnest attention to the nature of their disease.

It is unquestionably often a hard task to maintain such a deportment towards the sick and towards their friends. We are often exposed to causes of great

irritation. We are annoyed by unreasonable expectations and strange perverseness on the part of patients, and tormented by the unsatisfiable inquisitiveness of their friends. Then we are forced to maintain a firm and tranquil demeanor when we are tortured with anxiety ; to seem decided and confident in order that we may impart confidence, when we are distracted by doubt and uncertainty ; and to appear cheerful, when we are depressed by witnessing suffering and distress, and the defeat of our best endeavours for their relief.

We are apt to complain of the unreasonableness of patients and their friends, and we perhaps suffer ourselves too often to be betrayed into expressions of irritation and disgust at what appears to be an ungrateful and unfounded want of confidence on their part, though it really is not meant as such. We are not always so considerate in these cases as the circumstances demand. We do not make allowance enough for the effects produced by sickness on the mind ; for the irritability and feebleness which are its consequence ; for the impatience often manifested at delays and discomforts, which seem but trifling to us, who do not endure them, and who know that a little time will remove them ; but which appear serious evils to those, who suffer them, and who

do not know but they may portend some serious disaster. Neither do we always consider, that ignorance, more than wilfulness or malice, leads to those officious interferences, which so often perplex and harass us, and that the rule of morality, as well as of sound policy, should prompt us to forbear any expression of the annoyance which we may feel.

But it is useless to go through with all the details which present themselves on this subject. I can recommend but one general rule, which is of universal application, and by the faithful observance of which, one cannot fail to attain that species of address in his intercourse with patients, which will ensure him their confidence and affection. Let him really feel an interest in their welfare, as well as assiduously endeavour to understand and treat their diseases ; let him check in himself all impatience and irritation at unreasonableness or ingratitude on their part ; let him always cultivate, as a duty, kind and charitable feelings towards them ; and there is no fear but that he will manifest this state of mind in his conduct.

These are the most important moral qualities which the physician must exhibit in his character, considered in the point of view in which we are now looking at the profession. But there is another, which, though perhaps less absolutely neces-

sary to success, is of great importance; I mean that usually known by the phrase *decision of character*. I know that many regard this as a quality inherent by nature in some, and denied to others; and undoubtedly men differ in the degree in which they possess it. Some are originally fickle, vacillating, and undecided; others are self-confident and firm in opinion and action. But I believe that the sort of character necessary to gain confidence, in the physician, may be obtained by any man of tolerable sense, who can fully comprehend what it is, and will constantly act with reference to its acquisition. It consists in calmly making up his mind on every occasion from the best lights which he can bring to bear upon the case,—making up his mind distinctly as to the course which it is proper to pursue, and then steadily and undeviatingly pursuing that course, without shifting it from day to day to gratify any transient whim of the patient, or in consequence of some trifling change of symptoms. Not that one should obstinately persevere in any course, when circumstances decidedly show it to be a wrong one;—the proper character is shown by not making up one's opinion in the first instance without strong reasons and sufficient consideration,—and in not acting afterward without

the same. I am ready to say, that, in most instances, it were better to persevere in a plan of treatment which is not the very best the case admits, than lightly to change it from day to day with the chance of sometimes hitting upon a better and sometimes on a worse.

Our art is so imperfect, and so much conjecture interferes with correct judgment in disease, that the mind of the physician must necessarily be left in many cases,—nay, in a majority,—in a state of uncertainty with respect to the character of the disease he is to treat, and the best course to be pursued in its management. Now, as something must be done, and he is to act according to the best judgment he is able to form, the uncertainty which he feels should never appear in his language or manner. He may feel, for instance, in some hazardous case, that a powerful remedy is on the whole advisable, yet that there is some question whether it may not in the end retard recovery, protract the disease by exhausting the strength, or turn the scale against the patient's life by interfering with a salutary natural process, which would carry him through if left to itself. All this may pass through his mind, and require to be weighed before he comes to a decision. But when it has been weighed and the deci-

sion made, none of the doubts which hang over the matter should be suffered to appear to the patient. He cannot say to him, — “I am going to bleed you, but, after all, the effect of the remedy cannot be foreseen; it may give you temporary relief, it is true, and thus appear to you to be beneficial, but in the end it may be prejudicial, and perhaps cost you your life.” It is very clear, that to hold such language could never be advantageous either to the physician or the patient. No; whatever we decide to do, we must do as if it were the very best thing that can be done, and as if we had no misgivings about it. There is no deception in this. It is the principle on which we act in all the concerns of life.

I am desirous, when speaking of decision of character, to warn you against an error into which physicians sometimes, and the public very often fall. When they speak of decided practice, they commonly refer to the employment of powerful remedies; and a decided practitioner in their eyes is one who is bold and daring, who would carry the system by storm, and drive disease out of it by main force. But this is a wrong use of the term, and one may be misled by it into dangerous habits of action. A decided practitioner is one, who does that which the case seems to him to require, steadily and undeviat-

ingly, whether it be much or little. As much decision may be shown, — nay, I think much more, — in doing nothing, than in doing a great deal. Patients and their friends are seldom uneasy, when they see a great many means put in requisition for their relief; but it requires a rare combination of intelligence and moral force to keep them quiet, and to keep one's self also composed, when, amidst danger and pain and perhaps the fear of death, we feel ourselves called upon to adopt only palliative or negative means.

There is one other consideration relating to the formation of the medical character, to which also I wish to call your attention. At the present day, a new and strong impulse has been given to the investigation of medicine as a science. New and more accurate methods of studying the history of diseases have been put in practice. Nothing can be more desirable than that each one, according to his opportunity, should devote himself to this species of study. But there is apt to exist in the mind, when it becomes deeply interested in such pursuits, a tendency to confine the attention to the investigation for its own sake, without sufficient regard to the ultimate purposes for which it has been undertaken. Thus, the botanist becomes engaged in examining and

classifying plants, and feels no interest except in studying them as parts of a certain system of arrangement. It is the same with the entomologist and the mineralogist. And so, too, the physician may get engaged in the study of disease solely as a branch of natural history. He may come to look on patients, as the botanist does on his plants or the entomologist on his insects, merely as objects whose characteristics he is to investigate, and not fellow beings whose diseases he is to cure. There is, I say, a tendency to this, which every man feels more or less, when he becomes deeply interested in the study of the history of disease. He almost learns to feel, — indeed he may, unless he guard against it, quite learn to feel, — as if the sufferings, the health, and even the life of the patient were of secondary importance, when compared with the success of his investigations. It surely seems as if some men would be chagrined by a recovery, which should falsify their prediction as to the result of a case, or deprive them of the means of determining the accuracy of their diagnosis. It is no doubt desirable, that medicine should be thus studied. It is in the power of those who apply themselves to the natural history of diseases strictly, to confer great benefits on the profession by the treasures of knowledge which they

accumulate, and which can be only thus accumulated. But though all may make an approach to the same method of observation, yet all cannot do it to the same extent, nor ought any one to do it at the sacrifice of the more pressing duties which belong to his calling. It is well that one should look at diseases, and study them as objects of science; but the sick must not be treated so as to feel that they are regarded only in this light. He ought never to forget the higher duties which he owes them, as fellow men laboring under sufferings, which they believe him able to relieve. Nothing will more certainly deprive him of their confidence, and prevent his gaining their affection, than the exhibition of a spirit of this kind. Patients often evince much tact in fathoming the motives by which we are actuated in our treatment of them. And although they would, other things being the same, confide most in him who seemed to study most deeply their case; yet, did they imagine that the interest was of a purely selfish and scientific kind, suspicion would take the place of confidence, and they would apprehend that they were to be made the subjects of experiment, and not of a rational mode of treatment.

The considerations I have presented, have grown out of the remark made at the outset, that medical

success is not uniformly in proportion to medical desert, and that various other circumstances contribute to the progress made by an individual in medicine, considered, as an art, or profession. It might now perhaps be asked, if these circumstances contribute so much to success, why should we devote so much toil and time to the acquisition of medical knowledge, which, after all, is of so little avail. I answer, in the first place, that we have ourselves to satisfy as well as the public; and this we cannot do without understanding thoroughly the science which we profess. But, in the next place, I would repeat another remark, that, although many men fail who are, professionally speaking, well qualified, and many acquire practice and notoriety who are but indifferently qualified, yet none arrive at a truly desirable and permanent reputation, who are not well versed in the knowledge of their profession.

The reason of this is, that such a reputation must be conferred on a man by the voice of the members of the profession, who alone are competent judges of the merit of a medical practitioner. It is a fact that the public are no judges of this merit. They know nothing of medicine. It is truly astonishing to find how strangely ignorant of the first principles of medical science, and especially of medical evidence, are a

large proportion, I do not know but I may say, are all men out of the profession, even the most intelligent and learned. A celebrated writer on Education has remarked in substance, that all men are competent judges of the character of a physician, because any body can tell whether his patients lived or died. Perhaps a more shallow remark was never made. A physician himself, if he observe with the caution of a philosopher, may pass many years of careful observation without being able to determine with regard to the success of his practice in any one disease or with any one remedy. Nothing is more difficult, than to form such an estimate either concerning ourselves or others. But it were idle to exhibit the absurdity of the remark. When men form their opinion of a physician's character, they derive their materials from two sources. First, they judge of his capacity and attainments in medicine, by their observation of his capacity and attainments in other things. If they find a man exhibiting good sense and sufficient information on subjects with which they are acquainted, and observe him at the same time to be devoted to the business of his calling, they conclude very reasonably that he will employ the same qualities there; and they accordingly give him their confidence, although they are no judges whether he

proves deserving of it or not. Secondly, they judge of a physician's character by the standing which he maintains among his medical brethren. The effect of this is not always obvious, especially at first. But you may depend upon it as true, that few or none will rise to high and permanent reputation as physicians, who do not maintain a good standing with other physicians, and who have not their confidence. A man's permanent reputation must be given to him by the profession. No other is worth having *alone*.

This brings me to invite your attention to a few observations respecting the deportment of physicians toward each other. We are mutually dependent for our character and reputation. It is in our power to do much to exalt or debase others. What then should be our feelings, and what the principles which regulate our conduct, in this respect ?

The occupation of medical men, and the nature of their connexion with families and individuals, bring them constantly into immediate personal competition. Hence bad feelings are often excited, and we experience a constant tendency to detract from the merit of those who have succeeded to our exclusion. Whether this be the cause, however, or not, certain it is that we have always been notorious for our bad blood and bad faith. The quarrels of physicians have

become proverbial; and they are constantly guilty of the most illiberal judgment of each other's principles, knowledge, and practice. Probably nowhere else would the profession, in this respect, bear so favorable an examination, as in the city and community in which we live; yet how much room is there for amendment even here.

What then should regulate our conduct toward each other? We should consider the nature of the art we profess. At best it is involved in many uncertainties and difficulties. We know a little, — we guess a great deal. Of course we are liable to constant mistakes. Every man makes them, and makes them often. I would require no more certain sign of the insufficiency of a man's professional knowledge, than the boast that he was free from them. Now our constant tendency is to overlook our own, and dwell with complacency on those of others. We ought to do precisely the opposite. From a contemplation of our own mistakes, we may learn much. It is in fact the basis of experience. From that of others, we gain nothing, but an exaltation of our own pride, at the fancied debasement of another's. Where all are liable to err, charity and liberality of judgment are as politic as they are moral. We should neither disseminate nor dwell

upon the slanders uttered against others, for we know how prone men are to misstatements; and the illiberality we exercise toward them may in turn be exercised toward us, — as unjustly and uncharitably. It is enough that we are liable to be mistaken and misapprehended by the rest of the world. Our reputations are assailed, our feelings wounded, by the careless, and unthinking, and sometimes perhaps the malevolent conduct of those with whom we are conversant. Our motives are often misjudged, — even our honesty doubted, our skill and knowledge habitually called in question. Men, women, and children, whose utter ignorance is shown by the very fact that they do not know they are ignorant, are ever ready to pass judgment upon the conduct and management of able and experienced physicians. It seems to be supposed the easiest matter in the world to form an opinion on a medical subject; and it would be sometimes amusing, were it not so embarrassing, to have the opinion of some nurse or old woman gravely quoted as ample authority against us in a case of life and death.

It is enough, I say, that we are liable to all this; — let us not augment the evils of our calling by pursuing the same conduct toward one another, which we complain of the world for exercising toward us.

We are apt to judge our brethren, when we have really as few of the materials for a correct judgment, as the world has for forming its opinions concerning us. It is not uncommon to hear peculiarities of practice, which happen to differ widely from the notions which the speaker entertains, branded as the result of gross ignorance, or perversity of intellect, or even of absolute dishonesty. When shall we learn, in this world of ignorance and darkness, where the best lights which any of us obtain, serve but to render us sensible how little we know, and how little way we can penetrate into the truths of nature,—when shall we learn to admit difference of opinion, even on the most important points, to be no proof of ignorance or wilful perversity? When shall we learn, that candor, liberality, and forbearance in our judgment of the opinions and of the conduct of others, are the surest evidence of elevated attainments on our part? The truly enlightened are always the most candid; for none are so entirely aware of the amount of our ignorance, even on those subjects which we know best.

I have but one farther remark to make on the character at which we should aim, and the principles which should govern our conduct, when we enter on our professional career. It embraces a

consideration which should be strongly impressed upon us. The physician should consider the place he fills or may fill in society, and the influence he is capable of exerting on the community to which he belongs. Human society, and the influences which form the minds of men constituting it, are made up of a great variety of elements, and not the least among these is the character of individuals. A person of an ordinary station, not unfrequently, by some peculiar strength of character, gives a tone to the society of a place, either for good or evil. Much more may those have this influence, whose education and occupation naturally turn men's attention to them with confidence and respect. We have in this country no permanent class of men, who hold a certain rank and influence from birth or office. The corresponding place here is held by those whose profession or whose character gives them standing or influence. Hence we enter society at an advantage; our very calling predisposes mankind to give us their confidence. It is our duty to see that we do not abuse it.

Now it is very obvious, that an enlightened physician may do much to promote religion, morals, and the cause of education. He may, by his example and that of his family, aid in raising the standard of

mental and moral cultivation, wherever he may happen to be situated. He may contribute to the general improvement in taste and the arts. This is obvious enough. But I would dwell particularly on one circumstance in the professional character, which is not so commonly taken into consideration. Physicians are, among us, the only men who, as a class, have a scientific education. They are, by their business, men of science ; men, whose habits of investigation and thinking are, or ought to be, of a philosophical character. The study and practice of medicine has eminently a tendency to give this cast to the mind. No man can be regarded as accomplished in this profession, who does not understand the elements of natural philosophy and chemistry as well as of physiology. In our communities, the physician is the scientific man of the place. It is his duty, therefore, to keep up his acquaintance with science as he advances in life, and to promote the dissemination of scientific knowledge among his neighbours. The greatest deficiency in the character of men in general is the want of that power of judging with good sense, and of weighing the value of evidence, which is especially imparted by scientific pursuits. This deficiency is to be gradually removed by disseminating among them this kind of knowledge ;—and we

may do much directly and indirectly toward promoting this result. It is often urged as an objection to this attempt, that a little learning is dangerous. It is not true. A little learning is not dangerous on any subject, if it be truly elementary, if it be complete as far as it goes, and if its possessor be fully aware that the first and most important step, in the acquisition of knowledge, is to learn fully the limits of our knowledge ; and, as we go on acquiring it, to be able to measure exactly the progress we have made, and the uses to which we may be able to apply it.

I have, thus, Gentlemen, made such remarks on the conduct and character which become us in our professional relation, as appeared to me worthy of your serious consideration, and calculated to aid you in establishing in your minds the principles which are hereafter to guide you. There are many others of the same kind with those adverted to, which time does not permit us here to consider. There are also many important views relating to the mode in which we are to proceed in the acquisition of medical knowledge, the objects at which we are to aim, and the means of attaining those objects, which it would be desirable to impress on your minds. But on these subjects it is less likely that you will fail

in acquiring the necessary rules for your direction, than on those which I have selected for your consideration. And I have been influenced in this selection by the reflection, that, without a due regard to the principles of conduct which I have endeavoured to enforce, professional qualifications alone neither will nor ought to conduct you to the eminence to which you no doubt aspire.





